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The effect of self-differentiation training on the level of marital satisfaction among married female students

*Kobra Emami Rizi¹; Leila Borun²

¹Assistant professor, Department of Educational Sciences, Izeh Branch, Islamic Azad University, Izeh, Khuzestan, Iran.

²Faculty member, Department of Psychology, Izeh Branch, Islamic Azad University, Izeh, Khuzestan, Iran.

Abstract

Introduction: The present study aimed to investigate the effect of self-differentiation training on the level of marital satisfaction among married female students in Izeh branch, Azad Islamic University.

Materials and Methods: The sample size of this research consisted of 50 participants who were selected using simple random sampling method and were assigned into the experimental group (n=25) and control group (n=25). Measuring tool was Enrich Marital Satisfaction Scale (1989). The experimental group attended in self-differentiation training program for 8 sessions. The results analyzed by covariance test and SPSS software.

Results: The results indicated that Self-differentiation training influences the level of marital satisfaction in married women ($F=30.26, P<0.01$).

Conclusion: It seems that self-differentiation training can improve marital satisfaction among female students.

Keywords: Marital satisfaction, Marriage, Self-differentiation, Students

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Introduction

Human is originally a social being and the first platform for the actualization of this characteristic of the highest divine creation is definitely the sacred center of the family. Family is the first and most blessed social institution in the history and culture of human civilization (1). Marriage has been described as the most important and fundamental human relationship due to its role in establishing the family system and raising the next generation. One of the most important aspects of the marital system is the

satisfaction that spouses experience in marriage. Marital satisfaction is a positive and enjoyable attitude that a husband and wife have regarding various aspects of marital relations, such as communication, personality issues, conflict resolution, financial issues, sexual relations, and children (2). Marital satisfaction is defined as the couple's perception that their partner fulfills their needs and desires (3). Marital compatibility and satisfaction is not a static and fixed concept, and most couples experience minor changes in the level of satisfaction during their life together, and

*Corresponding Author: Department of Educational Sciences, Izeh Branch, Islamic Azad University, Izeh, Khuzestan, Iran.

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as a result, they always have to actively adapt themselves to various and changing aspects of their physical, social, and psychological environment (4). The concept of self-differentiation is the foundation of Bowen's theory. Bowen (1978) defines self-differentiation as the degree to which a person is able to balance a) rational-emotional functioning b) intimacy-autonomy in relationships. This concept defines people according to the degree of differentiation or fusion between intellectual and emotional functions. In fact, self-differentiation expresses the balance between autonomy and individuality in people (5). Also, self-differentiation is described as the degree to which a person is able to maintain his logical functions, when he is under pressure by emotional compulsions in the communication system. According to Bowen, the level of differentiation of a person is established in his family of origin. Therefore, it is widely affected by the dynamics and interactions between family members. He believes that individuals enter into marriage with lifestyle patterns and levels of self-differentiation that have been established in their original family (6). Bowen's theory states that a child's ability to differentiate himself is influenced by the emotional context of the family of origin. In a family with well-differentiated parents, children gradually learn to think of themselves as individuals, separate but related to family members. They learn how to regulate their emotions, as they act wisely in their choices about ideas, values, and beliefs. On the other hand, if the parents are poorly differentiated, the children consider themselves as following the parents or in a reactive position towards their values and opinions. In such a family, children fail in the development of their autonomy in a real way and lack consistent (stable) and reasonable approaches in response to life's challenges (7).

When people, especially in close relationships, try to base their sense of self on how their partner feels about them and how their partner validates them, then the intimacy in their relationship is destroyed and the growth and development of the relationship is impaired (8). It can be assumed that people who belong to undifferentiated families are more likely to be involved in marriages that are also undifferentiated and have higher dysfunction. It is likely that people who

are poorly differentiated, as a result of growing up in an undifferentiated family, are more likely to have specific attitudes toward marriage that will further affect and perhaps lead to future marriage success. Due to its malfunction, therefore, undifferentiated people tend to have undifferentiated marriages (9).

From the important aspects of compatibility with the issue of marriage, the feeling of satisfaction from married life requires the existence of stability of compatibility on the part of couples, and the feeling of satisfaction from marriage plays an important role in the level of normal family functions. Skowron investigated the role of self-differentiation on marital adjustment. The results of this research, which was conducted on 39 couples, showed that couples who were less emotionally passive and less detached from or mixed with others and had the ability to maintain their opinions, experienced higher levels of marital satisfaction. While couples who were less differentiated, faced more sadness and marital anxiety (10). In particular, Skowron found that emotional breakdown alone is a predictor of marital conflict, especially in men. Also, this research did not support Bowen's hypothesis, which states that people marry those who have similar levels of self-differentiation. In a research study on couples, Kruse found that individual, situational, and communication variables such as compatibility, attachment, and trust have an effect on people's ability to function in close relationships (11).

Considering that the component of self-differentiation as a concept that a person balances between rational functions, intimacy and autonomy in relationships, plays an important role in the relationships between family members and affects the quality of life and overall satisfaction of people in life, so the purpose of this research was to investigate the effect of self-differentiation training on the level of marital satisfaction among married female students of Islamic Azad University- Izeh branch.

Materials and Methods

The present study was conducted using a pre-test-post-test design with a control group. 25 married female students in the experimental group and 25 in the control group were randomly selected and replaced.

Research instruments

A) *Enrich Marital Satisfaction Scale*: This scale was created by Olson, Freund and Drinkman in 1989. It has a 125-question form and a 115-question form whose purpose is to determine work areas and strengths in marital relationships. The short form of the scale was prepared by Soleimani, which has 47 questions. The subject specifies his answers on a 5-point scale. Each option is given 1 to 5 points. Reliability of Enrich's 47-question scale through Cronbach's alpha of 65%. It has been calculated that the validation of this scale was correlated with stress scores and a significant negative relationship was obtained, which indicates the favorable correlation of this scale. And the validity of this scale was reported as 0.92 with the marital compatibility questionnaire (12).

B) *Educational program created by the researcher*: It was created for the purpose of

teaching self-differentiation based on Bowen's theory, and its validity was confirmed by 10 psychology experts who were randomly selected. This program was taught by researchers in eight one-hour sessions. According to Bowen's theory, there are at least 4 factors on the level of differentiation of a person; 1-emotional reaction 2-emotional breakdown 3-mixing with others 4-ability to get my position. The program is designed to teach self-differentiation skills and tasks such as writing characteristics writing down family history, writing down experiences or events and specifying the person's behavior and feelings towards the events that happened, writing down events that caused happiness, fear, anger, etc., and also writing down relationships with other people, listing their mistakes, Writing hypothetical notes of anxiety-provoking situations and checking the person's response to that situation, etc., were given to people.

Table 1: Educational structure of self-differentiation

Date	Title	Objective
1 st session	Familiarize participants with each other and introduce training objectives and perform pre-test	Establish sense of commitment to continue treatment sessions
2 nd session	Introduce communication boundaries in personal life	Awareness if how emotion, thought and behavior interfere
3 rd session	Train genograms and how to draw it	Examine the position of siblings, marital status and the degree of one's combination with extended family, emotional system of nuclear family, emotional detachment from parents, and Family's psychological projection, and examine triangles as well as the multi-generational transfer process and how to choose a spouse
4 th session	Establish a basis for developing intimacy	Recall memories caused grump, reconciliation and conflict, and express their reasons
5 th session	Identify one's emotional response toward each other, and be aware of personal positions	Examine situations where one experience anxiety and examine the most prevalent response in such situation, as well as assess the expression of one's own personal view
6 th session	Express existed attachment styles and their relation with further development of competence in social relationships	Examine the effect of attachment style in relation to the spouse
7 th session	Examine mind's diplopia toward issues and relationships, and how to make sense of events	Examine events and memories of cohabitation as well as write to ways of reviewing them What they are and what we make sense of them
8 th session	Summarize and make assessment of self	Perform post-test

Results

In order to investigate the effectiveness of self-differentiation training on marital satisfaction, the

data were analyzed using covariance analysis as follows.

Table 2: Covariance analysis of the effects of self-differentiation training on marital satisfaction

Change source	Sum of squares	Degree of freedom	Sum of squares	F	Significance level
pretest	31941,930	1	31941,930	90,70	0.00
group	10734,330	1	10734,330	30,269	0.00
error	16667,670	47	354,631		
total	1659152	49			

Table 3. Covariance analysis of the effects of self-differentiation training on marital satisfaction

Statistical indicator	Sum of squares	Degree of freedom	Sum of squares	Value F	probability of error P
Concomitant variable (personal issues)	1.851	1	1.851	3.49	0.068
Groups	20.686	1	20.686	39.095	0.00
Error	24.869	47	0.529		
Concomitant variable (marital relationship)	6.77	1	10.89	6.57	0.014
Group	10.89	1	1.030	10.57	0.002
Error	48.430	47	0.43		
Concomitant variable (conflict solution)	0.43	1	23.12	0.052	0.821
Groups	23.12	1	0.833	27.75	0.00
Error	39.15	47	5.61		
Concomitant variable (financial management)	5.61	1	2.15	4.92	0.031
Groups	2.15	1	1.139	1.89	0.00
Error	53.51	47	0.034		
Concomitant variable (leisure activities)	0.034	1	10.58	0.029	0.865
Groups	10.58	1	1.147	9.22	0.00
Error	53.886	47	2.19		
Concomitant variable (sexual relationship)	2.19	1	0.427	2.043	0.16
Groups	0.426	1	0.427	0.396	0.532
error	50.52	47	1.075		
Concomitant variable (marriage and children)	14.96	1	14.96	12.36	0.01
Groups	21.78	1	21.78	17.99	0.00
Error	56.87	47	1.21		
Concomitant variable (relatives and friends)	0.013	1	0.013	0.018	0.895
Groups	2.00	1	2.00	2.61	0.113
Error	35.98	47	0.766		
Concomitant variable (religious orientation)	6.55	1	6.55	16.58	0.00
Groups	11.176	1	11.176	28.28	0.00
error	18.569	47	0.395		

Based on the data in Table 3, it can be summarized that since the satisfaction of personal issues, conflict resolution, marital relationship, financial management, leisure activities, religious orientation, marriage and children were observed, therefore the research hypothesis based on the effect of self-differentiation training approved.

Discussion

Differentiation is the ability to express my position. Therefore, people who have the appropriate level of differentiation are self-motivated; That is, they are aware of their own thoughts and feelings and they express them, and

they don't feel compelled to conform to the unreasonable expectations of others. In contrast to differentiated people, they are mostly emotionally dependent on others and are hard on themselves. They think, feel and act (13).

The more differentiated people are, they seem to be more flexible, allow intimate communication, tolerate differences of opinion, and experience less emotional passivity. When faced with conflict, such couples have more tolerance for differences of opinion and as a result feel less threatened (14). In the explanation of the theoretical researches, it can be stated that from the systems dimension, when the mixed self-

differentiation is low, there will be a possibility that it will lead to the decrease of individuality and the sameness of one's thoughts and feelings with others (15). Considering that the basis of the conscious process of self-differentiation is the conscious control of anxiety, therefore, the training of self-differentiation, which is a way of expressing and separating feelings and thoughts, causes the reduction of anxiety in marital relationships and creates an opportunity for the emergence and development of self-esteem. It becomes personal that this issue has an important effect on the creation of couples' relationships and it is possible to make the person make mistakes by expressing opinions and opinions in time and thus strengthen the marital relationship (16). Therefore, it is natural to expect that self-differentiation training can have an effect on increasing people's marital satisfaction, since self-differentiation training strengthens the skills of separating reason from emotion in a person, it makes the person acquire the necessary skills to control and regulate. Gain emotions and can also have a clear definition of themselves and their opinions, and better determine the direction and purpose of their lives, and self-control in intense

emotional situations that lead to involuntary behaviors and making unsuccessful decisions in many people.

Also, self-differentiation training helps people distinguish between their reason and their feelings and have higher emotional maturity. These skills can be involved in married life and affect the level of marital satisfaction (17). Since self-differentiation training helps people show less avoidant attachment style in their relationships and trust others more, it makes people have higher levels of trust in their married life and people with secure attachment make their spouse more reliable and trustworthy (18).

Conclusion

Self-differentiation training strengthens problem-solving skills, emotion control, flexibility and anxiety reduction in interpersonal relationships and correct recognition of personal needs and abilities. Since married life may sometimes be accompanied by tension, people who are more self-distinguished can better resolve these conflicts because they are equipped with problem-solving and emotion control skills.

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